

CITY OF ROCKVILLE PLANNING DIVISION
STAFF REPORT

January 20, 2005

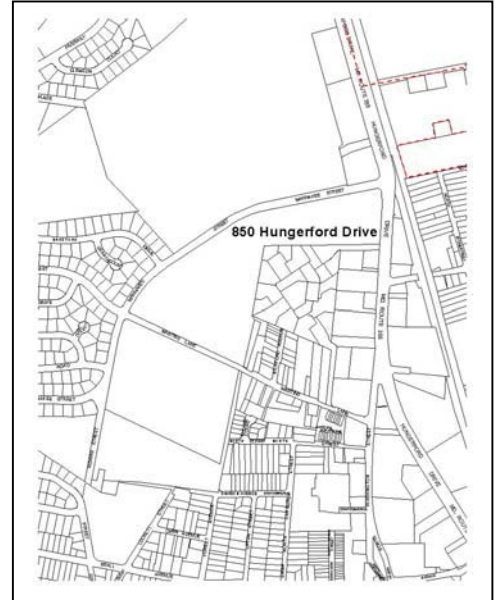
SUBJECT:

Special Exception Application SPX2004-00351

Applicant: Montgomery Community College
 c/o Alan Yanaway
 900 Hungerford Drive
 Rockville, Maryland 20850

Property Location: 850 Hungerford Drive
 Rockville, Maryland 20850

Planning Commission Review Date: January 26, 2005
Board of Appeals Public Hearing Date: February 5, 2005



PREVIOUS RELATED ACTION:

Historic District Commission HDC2004-00316, Montgomery Community College, a proposal to expand and upgrade an existing surface parking lot located in the eastern area of the subject site at 850 Hungerford Drive; proposed new lot will serve as an interim use until structured parking can be constructed on the college's main campus. Initially approved by the Historic District Commission on October 21, 2004. The Landscape Plan is pending final approval by the Historic District Commission on January 20, 2005.

REQUEST:

The request is submitted in accordance with Section 25-296 of the City of Rockville Zoning Ordinance. The applicant seeks special exception approval to expand the existing surface parking facilities located on the referenced property owned by the Montgomery County Public School's Board of Education. A portion of the lot is currently leased to Montgomery Community College. The existing (387 space) parking lot, is located on the former George Washington Carver High School property. Both Montgomery County Public Schools Board of Education staff, and students attending Montgomery Community College use the subject parking lot, which is located in the eastern area of the site.

The overall Carver School site is approximately 30 acre \pm in size and zoned for R-S (Residential Suburban) land usage. In accordance with the City's Zoning Ordinance, the existing site and use are deemed to be "publicly owned or operated building facilities." Hence, in order to expand the site's existing surface parking facilities, the applicant request the special exception be approved as submitted.

RELEVANT ISSUES:

In reviewing the application request, the following issue/s emerged and are to be addressed as is appropriate:

- Site plan/s should be amended to clearly denote the portion of the overall property, which is located within the historic district.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approval is recommended subject to the following conditions:

1. The proposed parking lot must be constructed and used in substantial accordance with the site development and landscape plans, as submitted with the subject application request.
2. Handicapped parking spaces must be provided in accordance with applicable requirements of the State of Maryland Building Code for the Handicapped.
3. Landscaping in the amount of two and one-half (2½) square feet per parking space shall be provided for developments containing 40 or more parking spaces. The proposed landscape/planting plan must be incorporated in the site's Forest Conservation Plan (FCP).
4. Site lighting for the new parking lot must be installed so as not to create glare and/or light spillage onto abutting roadways and onto neighboring residential and non-residential properties.
5. Provide sidewalk (eight feet in width) with a tree buffer, along the site's Hungerford Drive (Md. State Route 355). Applicant must obtain all appropriate permits from the State Highway Administration (SHA) for all work done within state right-of-way (r/w).
6. Verify the ownership of storm drain, water and sewer located in the proposed parking lot.

ANALYSIS:

Site Description

As noted, the subject 30.65-acre County school property is the former George Washington Carver High School property, which today serves as the County School Board's headquarters. The property has street frontage along Mannakee Street and Hungerford Drive (Md. Route 355). The property is bounded to the north by Montgomery Community College, to the east by general commercial and service industrial uses, to the south by general commercial and multifamily (low) density residential uses, and southwest and south by the Rock Terrace School and single-family detached dwellings. The existing (387 space) site surface parking lot, which is to be expanded under the special exception request, is located in the eastern area of the overall property. Vehicular access to the overall site and the parking lot that will be expanded is via Mannakee Street.

Several years ago, a significant portion of the former high school site, along with its building facilities, received historic district designation by the Mayor and Council. Staff notes that part of the parking lot being expanded under the subject special exception request is located in that historic district.

At its meeting on October 21, 2004, the HDC approved application HDC2004-00316 to build the new parking lot, which will be located at the eastern edge of the existing parking lot. Based on available information, the HDC expressed concern about obscuring views of the original Carver High School building and was in favor of reducing the number of trees within the historic district boundary. Thus, one of the HDC conditions of approval requires “the final landscape plan must be reviewed and approved by the HDC prior to the issuance of a building permit.”

In addition to the man-made site improvements, the property currently contains a variety (although modest number) of mature trees, shrubs, and hedges, flowering and non-flowering plantings, all of varying sizes and species. The site’s topography ranges from flat to gentle and gradual sloping. The site’s surface elevation along its Hungerford Drive frontage is somewhat higher than the grades located in the front-side (eastern area) of the site, the area where the subject parking lot is to be expanded. Thus, there is evident but not pronounced differential in the surface elevations along Hungerford Drive and those that make up the overall site.



Site Use & Project Proposal

The applicant (Montgomery Community College-MCC) is been authorized by Montgomery County Public Schools to submit the subject request, a proposal to expand the site's eastern most surface parking facilities via construction of a new surface parking facility. The Board of Education currently leases 75 of the 387 surface parking spaces located in that lot to MCC as overflow parking for the college's students and faculty. The new parking lot expansion would be constructed in what is now open/green space, which makeup the eastern most area of the Carver Center site. Under the subject proposal, 106 parking spaces within the existing 387-space parking lot would be eliminated to accommodate reconstruction of main parking lot site entrance and driveway, installation of new landscaped parking lot islands, and ultimate expansion of the parking lot.

A total of 438 new parking spaces would be created under the expansion proposal. Once completed, there would be a total of 719 parking spaces provided. All of the proposed 438 parking spaces created under the expansion project, would be for the use of MCC students and staff. The remaining 281 parking spaces would be designated for use by MCPS Board of Education staff, housed in the Carver Center building facility. The new parking facility will be landscaped in accordance with requirements of the Zoning Ordinance and Forest and Tree Preservation Ordinance. The applicant will also provide stormwater management facilities to accommodate new site drainage as created by added storm water runoff from the newly created impervious area of the parking lot expansion. Site lighting and pedestrian walkways will also be provided to allow safe and efficient access to and from the new parking lot (See Exhibit 3).

Based on the information as provided, the new parking lot will add 5.47 acres of impervious area to the 30.65 acre site. It is noted that the total impervious area will be under 50 percent of the subject overall site. While the parking lot is being constructed as an interim facility, the college has a renewable 10-year lease on the property from the Board of Education and as such, the newly expanded parking facilities will likely be used and needed by MCC for the foreseeable future.

No other site improvements or site alternations are proposed to the Carver Center property. In order to expand and renovate the subject parking facilities as proposed, and implement other associated site improvements, the applicant seeks approval of the special exception request as submitted.

Applicable Sections of the Zoning Ordinance & Staff Analysis

Section 25-296 of the Ordinance allows "publicly owned or operated buildings" in the R-S (Suburban Residential) zone as a special exception land use. As per Section 25-338 of the Ordinance, the Board of Appeals shall not grant any petition for a special exception unless it finds from a preponderance of the evidence of record that:

1. The proposed land use will not adversely affect the City's Master Plan (the Plan), Zoning Ordinance, or any other applicable law; and

The Carver High School was originally built in 1951. After its closure, the County School system renovated the building facilities for use as the Board of Education's administrative offices. Today the building facilities and property continue to serve as administrative office and support space for an array of the County's School operations. The planned expansion of the site's eastern most parking lot does not adversely affect the City's Master Plan land use designation of the property. The Plan's current land use designation of the site is for "public buildings and facilities, which is consistent with the current site use. As per the proposed site development plans as submitted with the request, the proposed parking lot expansion complies with applicable Zoning Ordinance requirements and other applicable law. The applicant continues to work closely with City staff to insure that the development project fully complies with all applicable land use and development standards.

Staff agrees with the applicant's statement, that the planned parking lot expansion will help to insure that both students and faculty will have access to much needed (off-campus) vehicular parking, which is within reasonable proximity of the college, until such time that ample on campus parking can be provided under MCC's implementation of its site master planning process.

Staff notes that by allowing "publicly owned or operated buildings," by grant of special exception, in respective residential zones, inference is made from the ordinance that such uses are appropriate in such zones if it can be demonstrated the use will not be adverse to site area land uses. As of this writing, staff has found no evidence that the existing site facilities and/or its improvements have adversely impacted any applicable law or land use requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.

2. The proposed use at the location selected will not: a) Adversely affect the health and safety of residents in the area; or b) Overburden existing public services, including water, sanitary sewer, public roads, storm drainage and other public improvements; or c) Be detrimental to the use or development of adjacent properties or the neighborhood; or d) Change the character of the neighborhood in which the use is proposed, considering services currently required, population density, character, and number of similar uses; and

The proposed parking lot expansion project will create additional vehicular parking, which will serve as overflow parking for MCC faculty, staff, and possibly visitors. Since the eastern site area of the Carver Center property is currently improved with surface parking facilities, the planned expansion of the facilities is unlikely to alter the character of site area. Expansion of the parking facilities is designed so MCC students and staff who cannot find vehicular parking on campus will not be forced to park in nearby or surrounding residential neighborhoods or on adjacent streets. As noted, the applicant is fully committed to landscaping the new parking facilities in accordance with all applicable requirements of the Zoning and Forest & Tree Preservation Ordinances. As required by the Ordinance, the new surface parking facilities will be well lighted to provide for a safe and secure environment for persons using the parking lot during nighttime hours. Staff will continue to work with the applicant to insure that new site lighting will be installed in such a manner that lighting does not create glare or spillage onto adjacent roadways and/or neighboring land uses within the site area.

Vehicular site ingress/egress will continue to be via Mannakee Street. The new parking facilities main site entrance will be reconstructed and widened to provide for safe and efficient vehicular site ingress and egress. Also, internal pedestrian walkways and crosswalks will be provided within the surface parking facilities, providing defined and designated pathways for persons walking to and from the parking facility.

Based on available information, staff has found no evidence that existing public services within the site area would be adversely impacted or overburdened by the planned parking lot expansion project. Existing site utilities and/or public water, sanitary sewer, storm drainage systems in and around the site will not require upgrade in order to accommodate the planned parking lot expansion.

Staff found no evidence that the existing Carver Center site or its existing parking facilities have been detrimental to the use and/or development of neighboring land uses. According to City land use records, the vast majority of the residential land uses within the subject site, were developed after the former Carver High School was constructed. As previously noted, none of the Carver Center's site building facilities will be altered or expanded under the subject request. In its October 2004 review of the proposal, the Historic District Commission requested that new plantings along Mannakee Street and those that will be planted within the new parking facilities, be planted so as not to obstruct the view of the original Carver building. The HDC deemed it important that an appropriate view-scape be maintained looking westward from Hungerford Drive and Mannakee Street onto the former school building.

Lastly, at this stage in the development review process, there is no indication that the delivery and availability of public services within the site area will be altered or reduced by the planned parking lot expansion, e.g., police, fire and rescue, refuse collection, etc. Staff notes that the community college is a commuter school and as such, does not have residential housing facilities on campus, thus the planned parking expansion will not impact site area population densities.

3. The proposed use complies with requirements of the Zoning Ordinance that are applicable thereto.

The subject application request and accompanying site development proposal as submitted, comply with all applicable land use regulations and development standards, e.g., minimum lot size, lot width, maximum lot coverage, and setback requirements from public rights-of-way (Ref. Sections 25-311 & 356 of the Ordinance).

Based on all of the noted factors, staff finds suitable justification to recommend Special Exception Application SPX2004-0351 be approved, subject to the conditions as referenced on page two of this staff report.

COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION PROCESS

Notification cards were sent to abutting property owners informing them of the application request and upcoming Planning Commission review and Board of Appeals public hearing, at

Staff Report

which time the subject land use request will be publicly heard and considered. Notices were sent to 500 property owners located within the subject site area. A list of the addresses where notices were sent is contained in the project's application file for public review and inspection.

Attachments

Exhibit "1" – Historic District Map

Exhibit "2" – Existing Conditions/FSD Plan

Exhibit "3" – Site Development Plan

Exhibit "4" – Proposed Landscape Plan

Attachment "A" – Authorization Letter

Attachment "B" – Md. State Assessment Sheet